Performance Matters

Maternal Matters

by **Shane Bedwell**

A look at the progression of Hereford female traits.

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There has been a lot of positive energy surrounding the Hereford marketplace this fall, and it is encouraging to see and hear the success stories regardless of the production point/emphasis Hereford breeders are experiencing. It is clear that above average cattle paired with strong breeder reputation equal a great outcome, especially in a year like this when folks aren't willing to gamble — they want the sure bet. "Come Home to Hereford" could not be more apparent with renewed interest in the breed, as well as the increased demand experienced at the fall bull sales. Hereford genetics are simply working, and folks know they can count on them.

Invest in your females

Along these lines I want to continue to encourage you to focus on the cow families and females that have made this breed legendary for the last 140 years. Keeping a keen eye on feet and leg structure, along with great teat and udder structure, will allow the breed to continue to distance itself from the rest. Continued longevity of these cow families and their potency they can pass on through their sons will certainly keep the breed strong and commercial cattlemen coming back for more.

In the Breed Improvement section of the 2020 *Annual Report* you will find some great trends relative to female traits and strong improvements in the last 10 years. On average, over the last decade the expected progeny differences (EPDs), Milk (M) and Sustained Cow Fertility (SCF) improved by 38% and 36% respectively. Admittedly, M is a value that needs to suit your environment and your commercial customers' needs, but as a whole, I think most will agree this trend is favorable, especially when you factor in the increase in udder and teat EPD improvement by better than a 12% increase in the last 10 years. Combining the two of these is not easy and often antagonistic, but progress is being made.

Likewise, as you study the improvements and favorable trend line for the SCF EPD, you may question how the data was acquired for this EPD as its first published production run was in 2017. Because Whole Herd Total Performance Reporting (TPR™) is celebrating its 20th anniversary, phenotypes are available and comparisons can be made even though this trait is new. It is encouraging this trend is indicating that we are heading in the right direction and providing a great barometer for making key decisions — even more so now given the fact the genomic component is contributing to all maternal traits. This definitely gives you a more informed picture of what those daughters can be like later in life opposed to waiting until they are in production.

The investment in female genotypes compared to male genotypes is also telling as you compare the trend and shift in the last 10 years (see Figure 1). Of the total genotypes turned in 2019, 57% were female genotypes. This speaks strongly to the continued investment in breed advancement and dedication to improvement. It is undeniable that marrying this knowledge with years of cow family history paves the way to progress for generations to come. HW

Figure 1: Genotype breakdown